Minutes
NV COMMUNICATIONS STEERING COMMITTEE

DATE	September 14, 2004
TIME	1:15 pm – 3:00 pm
LOCATION	401 S. Carson Street, Rm 4100 – Carson City 555 Washington St, Rm V4401 – Las Vegas
RECORDER	Maggie Thorne

ATTENDANCE

Carson City Members	Present	Las Vegas Members	Present
Terry Savage, Chair, Dept of Information Technology	✓	Anthony DeMeo, Nye County	
Robert Chisel, Dept of Transportation	✓	Dennis Cobb, LV Metro Police Dept	✓
Neil Harris, Elko County Sheriff's Office		Rod Massey, Clark County	
Heidi Sakelarios, NV Health Division		Jack Staley, LV Valley Water District	✓
Dave Hosmer Dept of Public Safety		Ronda Hornbeck, Lincoln County	✓
Dan Newell, City of Yerington	✓		
Ralph Jaeck, City of Reno	✓		
Chris Lake, NV Hospital Association			
Dan Holler, Douglas County	✓		

Staff

Name	Present	Name	Present
Mark Blomstrom, Dept of Information Technology		Glade Myler, Attorney General's Office	✓
Maggie Thorne, Dept of Information Technology	✓	Dave McTeer Dept of Administration	
Jim Wilson, Clark County/SNACC			

I. CALL TO ORDER

Terry Savage called the meeting to order at 1:15 pm.

II ROLL CALL/MINUTES

The roll call was conducted by Maggie Thorne. Present: 8 members, 0 alternates Absent: 6. A quorum was present.

Terry recalled that the Committee had agreed to drop any member who missed two consecutive meetings and he felt the Committee needs to enforce that rule since there are many people interested in serving on this Committee. Terry asked Maggie to look into this.

A motion by Dan Holler and seconded by Jack Staley to approve the minutes from the August 10, 2004 was approved. Motion carried.

III. DISCUSSION ON COMMUNICATIONS INTEROPERABILITY PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Tim Peters, President, Tech Knowledge provided to the members his third progress report. The company is continuing to carry our data collection which is currently in progress. He indicated the timing for the survey was bad since it was budget time for most agencies. Tim said many participatants have asked for additional time and hence is behind the curve to get responses. A number of folks said they didn't get their copy, which is interesting since Tech Knowledge verified every last address, however they are sending out replacement packages immediately when they learn of the issue.

Mark Blomstrom distributed a copy of the survey participants to the members in the North and noted that there were 340 agencies with responses from 82 or 25%. Tim indicated they do have some concern in some of the counties responding – Elko has been pretty light, and no responses from Esmeraldo and Eureka counties. Humboldt is on the thin side and Gene Hill said he would rattle some cages. Lander County only one response from the volunteer fire department. Lincoln County is on the thin side. Lyon County is also thin. Mineral County we've only heard from the Fire Department and Pershing is also thin.

Terry asked that Tim take his list and identify the top 50 that he would most like to have and zap to him and with the help of his staff and members on the Committee, additional calls could go out. Tim agreed that would be a fine thing.

Terry asked what date were we looking at for starting the analyst and putting a cut-off on the data. Tim asked for the Committee's agreement to allow the following two weeks for responses and at the end of next week, drop the gate and begin detailed analysis. He indicated he sees a lot of patterns developing, but with serious county wide holes, he doesn't want to make too many assumptions. Terry said that was a reasonable proposal and there was no objections from the Committee so Terry gave Tim the go ahead on his schedule.

Tim said that there is a fair amount of Federal interest in coming up with a resolution to this (interoperability) problem. They recognize that Nevada operates under a unique set of circumstances and that they will be a part of any solution to address the long-term needs of the state. So we have good federal interest which is promising and we are making good headway for developing some governance that will work out well for the long run as well.

IV. COORDINATION AND STATUS UPDATE

(This item was presented first during the meeting)

Marty Scheuerman, Chief of Operations, Reno Fire Department, incident commander on the Waterfall Fire in Carson City and Operations Chief on the Andrew Lane Fire in Reno, spoke to the membership on interoperability. Communications wise, there are interesting things going on and felt because of the interest of this Committee he would share them. [The following are quotes from Chief Scheuerman]

"From a field prospective its (communication) not working very well. Hasn't worked very well over the years and seems to be getting worse. There are a few elements that I

think everyone needs to be aware of is the interaction between the different fire agencies on wild land fires is probably our largest concern in terms of multi-agency type of responses. The Federal Government, all of their resources are on a VHF system, the regional system in Washoe that we are on is a 800 meg system, the ambulance company in Reno and surrounding areas is on the 450 spectrum. During wild land fires typically we interact on an everyday basis with surrounding agencies as well as the Federal Government. The Feds in their infinite wisdom came up with their narrow banding proposal and taking their VHF frequencies and narrow banded them. What this did with us and local government that didn't have narrow band radios allowed us still to talk to the Feds but part of the problem with it is that the volume of non-narrow band capable radios comes through on the narrow band radios very faint. So if you turn down your radio to normal level to listen to the other narrow banded radios from the other Federal agencies you'll miss a critical transmission from a local government or someone who has a non-narrow band radio and that puts somebody in danger. That is a typical thing we have to live with on a everyday basis. Further down the road, I believe the 2006/2007, the Federal government has mandated that all their resources be made digital and to tell you the truth there are very few digital capable radios out there in local government. For us to interact with the Federal Government, US Forestry, Bureau of Land Management, Indian Affairs, these resources come from all over the united states, we will not have the ability to communicate unless we re-outfit all of our equipment with digital capable VHF. Hence the real importance of the interoperability. Some of the other aspects that we deal with everyday is our mutual and automatic aid agreements requires us to work with other counties and agencies that are outside our regional service area that are on their own VHF frequencies. This necessitates that every vehicle have at least two radios, have at least two sets of HTs and if you can feature the firefighter stepping out of the vehicle to try and maintain contact with their own dispatch, their own resources and mutual aid resources, you might as well wear a bandolier of radios around their neck!

Waterfall started out as a Division of Forestry, Carson City and US Forest Service incident. As it grew the Sierra Front Incident Management Team to take over the fire, which expanded rapidly. As it did, other resources were requested from all over western Nevada as well as California. Now we have a few compatible frequencies that everybody carries. In the VHF spectrum we have White 1, White 2, White 3 and White 4 which are the same frequencies CA uses for their mutual aid frequencies as well, but those are 'line of sight'. When a fire goes over the hill, typically the radio transmissions don't. So that means we have to go to some sort of repeated frequency. For us to go to a repeated frequency, it has to be one of the agency's repeated frequencies, in this particular case it was the Humboldt/Toyabie frequency, which tied up their entire force net to provide a command frequency back to Minden for dispatch as well as people over the hill to be able to talk to the Incident Commander. And as other resources come from all over the place to assist, some of them have it and some of them don't. Some of them are narrow-band, some of them aren't. So you can see the start of the problem from the beginning. So we start fishing around for common frequencies that everyone has. Well let's try this, but it will tie them up for any other incidents that they may have anywhere else. So one of the first problems we run into is the available of a repeated command frequency that is not part of a normal dispatch frequency. One that doesn't tie up that agency's ability to dispatch their resources elsewhere or doesn't interrupt critical operations while they are trying to dispatch resources elsewhere to a second incident. You can imagine the types of traffic that may come over it and the confusion that may ensue of well is this unit of my incident? Is this unit on somebody else's incident? That was one of the other problems early on. As the traffic starts to grow and we start getting a lot of resources we try to break the incident into manageable units and we will assign each geographic portion of that a tactical frequency to relieve the strain on the

initial command frequency and the initial tactical frequency. Here again, a fire like the Waterfall fire had four different tactical frequencies and one command frequency and this is a just a function of the traffic on each one of them, plus we are also having to monitor an air to grown frequency to talk to the aircraft as well as the command frequency. This was the problem as well with the Andrew Lane Fire. We started out on a Truckee Meadows Frequency, now one of the things that we have done due to consolidation of Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District and the City of Reno Fire Department is we were able to retain our repeated VHF frequency and use it as a local mutual aid frequency for wild land fires and mutual aid incidents coming in, it gives us the ability to go to a repeated frequency that is usual free (we still have to dispatch our volunteers on it because 800 meg hasn't come up with an 800 meg pagers yet.) We started out on that frequency (for Andrew) and as things built we had to bring in statewide 1 and then the command frequencies changed and this is typical. Local agencies will respond, they will set up command and their own frequencies and when the Feds come in they assign it a command frequency that is compatible with them. Again we get into narrow band issues and the potential of the digital issues in the future, but the mere fact trying to migrate people that are in the middle of a heavy duty fire fight over to a new frequency, you are going to lose people which is a safety consideration. If they don't have communications and they come up with a critical cast (the fire is blowing up on them, their trapped etc.) we may not hear it because we are not sure if everybody made the transition in the heat of battle. So we have some real issues going on and I think some of the solutions we need to look at is some sort of statewide repeated frequencies for mutual aid and it is a function of our typography – doesn't matter if you are in Ely or here or Gardnerville, the land is not flat – contrary what the East Coast thinks, Nevada is not flat and it is really tough to talk to the person on the other side of the hill.

There is a statewide EMS system in the 450 range, but everyone is migrating away from 450 and here again we have a statewide ability to provide 800 MHz, I think that there needs to be a mirror side or mirror frequency on 800 MHz to take care of the EMS portion. The main thing is technology, we can send a man to the moon, we can see people in Iraq in the dark from a satellite a zillion miles away, but we can't get some sort of device that takes one radio transmission on another frequency and seemly integrates it into another and allows us to talk on both systems without creating a big problem. There needs to be some real focus of technology to make that kind of thing happen. In terms of statewide usage and standards of those frequencies is very important as well. We need to partner up with the Federal Responders because they seem to do their own thing regardless of what we do in the state or local level, the Feds will do their own thing. And their thing is going to cost us money, money that we don't have nor money that the Feds aren't willing to part with, so somebody has to go to the Feds and say hey stop the madness – you guys are going on your own track and you want locals to be able to follow and talk to you, but where are they going to get the money to pay for the radios? A small volunteer dept out in the middle of lower east armpit Nevada that has 40-50 radios, where are they going to get the money for new narrow-band radios? Plus the maintenance and everything. So we are expected to follow on this track and be responsible for these major wild land fires and other catastrophes. Some short term interim solutions we have done in Washoe County is retaining the Truckee Meadows VHF frequency and we permanently causewaying it to our regional 800 system, takes up 4 positions in our radio with each repeater and allows our personnel to talk on the same radio, on the 800 meg system and go to the VHF repeated system, which is a huge benefit to having to carrying different radios, which one is talking and am I on the right frequency with this one and that?

We do work arounds to get us by, that's the problem with our communication. Getting us by is going to get someone killed and that is what we are afraid of. All in all, looking at communications on these incidents and how it came down – number 1, trying to get the incidents split into frequencies we can use. We dodge the bullet over the past 25 years. It's amazing and a testament to the fact that people have their head's up and paying attention to what's going on and fire fighters work around anything. They will find a way to make it work, but like I said over the years we have been lucky but I don't know how long our luck will run out."

Terry Savage added that that paints a pretty good picture of how it is in the field and you really put a realistic picture in our minds of what life is like under these conditions. A good question is who is going to pay, show me the money. Years ago people didn't know what interoperability meant; today the legislature and Feds know what the issues are and know there is a problem because they are aware of compatibility. There is no cheap solution for this and who is going to pay for it. NCSC's charter is to come up with a plan for resolving this problem and a consultant is coming up with the requirements definition for what we need for interoperability.

Marty mentioned that the 800 MHz system is working extremely well.

V. GRANTS UPDATES

Mark mentioned that congratulations go to Health Care preparedness for securing their $13 million grants (two) which was announced by the Governor today.

Mark also said we have our grant in to the National Governor's Association per last meeting's discussion for a policy academy to specifically work on policy for interoperability. Mark mentioned that he should be hearing soon whether or not Nevada will be participating.

VI. LEGISLATIVE AND LEGAL UPDATE

Terry mentioned that IFC meeting is scheduled for 9/15 and there may be some reporting and/or discussion on the NHP migration.

VII. PUBLIC COMMENT

None presented.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 2:05 pm
Future Meeting: October 5, 2004
Minutes are posted on the website at: http://ncsc.nv.gov/
Questions Call: 775-684-5859 or email maggiet@doit.state.nv.us
Draft minutes submitted by Maggie Thorne, 09/16/04
APPROVED: _____ DATE: _____